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THE DISCURSIVE FRAMING OF INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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This study examines how international education programs in British Columbia have been discursively framed by government and media sources. Over the past two decades, international education programs have expanded in number and scale in the province, a phenomenon that has been interpreted by some education researchers and media sources as predominantly an effort to generate further revenue from international student tuition fees. However, international education programs are also seen as opportunities for increased internationalization, with students from different national and cultural backgrounds in BC schools alongside domestic students. We draw upon the concept of *mediatization* of policy to position and understand the relation between the state and media sources in the shaping of public understanding of education policy, as well as upon the theoretical lenses of marketization and internationalization for analysis. Methodologically, we employ critical discourse analysis to examine government documents and texts from provincial and local media sources. Findings suggest that there has not been a co-constitutive role for government and media in discursively presenting international education programs, with differing foci between groups and even within groups.

Introduction

Fallon and Poole (2014) observe that market-driven revenue sources, characterized by commodification of education services, competition among schools and districts, and expanded consumer (i.e., parent and student) choice, are becoming increasingly evident for K–12 public education in British Columbia (BC). These types of revenue streams have not been traditionally associated with the financing of K–12 public education in the province. In the current funding climate, market-driven revenue is drawn from private sources, with international education (IE)

programs as a primary example. These programs are common in BC school districts, as well as in districts and boards across the country, and in jurisdictions around the world. IE programs draw tuition-paying, non-resident international students into K–12 public schools to study alongside local students. These programs now constitute the second largest source of revenue for BC school districts (Kuehn, 2012), although making up a very small percentage of overall funding in comparison to government transfer payments. IE programs in BC generated approximately \$156 million in 2013–14 for all districts combined (BC Ministry of Education, 2014a). In BC, and in other jurisdictions, these programs are receiving increasing attention, in terms of resource allocation and as a focal point for economic growth within the financing of public education in the province (BC Ministry of Advanced Education, 2013).

IE Programs are noteworthy not only because they provide an expanding form of funding for public education, but, perhaps more importantly, because they have been argued as a new form of privatization of public education, although not necessarily privatization in a traditional sense. Privatization of public services is defined as the transfer of ownership, governance, or provision from the public sphere to the private sector (Lubienski, 2006; Whitty & Power, 2000). However, a number of education researchers, including Ball (2007), Burch (2009), and Lubienski (2006), argue that a more nuanced reading of privatization is now necessary to capture some of the subtle (and in some jurisdictions not so subtle) shifts occurring in education reform. As an example, Ball and Youdell (2008) offer a conceptual distinction between *exogenous* privatization, denoting participation by private businesses in public education, and *endogenous* privatization, denoting a shift in the thinking and behaviour of public education actors toward more “private-like” motivations (e.g., efficiency, entrepreneurialism, image management). IE programs carry traits of both endogenous and exogenous privatization. Although privatization is

treated as a politically sensitive issue in the Canadian context, Fallon and Poole (2014) note the expansion of IE programs has gone largely unacknowledged, with very little public reaction. These researchers suggest the term *creeping privatization* (Fallon & Poole, 2014) and cite concern for equity of education access—between international students, as paying customers, and local students, who attend free of charge—and for education as a public rather than private good (H. M. Levin, 2001; Lubienski, 2006).

We take this absence of public reaction as an embarkation point for this paper, and pose the problem of how the general public might come to understand IE programs as a particular course of education reform. We draw upon Ball's (1993) policy-as-discourse approach, which conceptualizes policy processes as complex, multifarious undertakings that simultaneously constitute policy problems and their corresponding solutions. We also draw upon the concept of *mediatization* of education policy, developed in the work of Lingard and Rawolle (2004), and expanded upon by Rawolle (2005, 2010), which posits a relationship between the state and the media in co-constructing a particular discourse on an education problem and its policy solution. This, in turn, may shape the way that the public comes to understand a particular policy reform. This perspective is not unique to the field of education, as the role of the media has been widely recognized in relation to the shaping of public opinion in a range of social and economic contexts (Fairclough, 1995).

Methodologically, we apply critical discourse analysis (CDA), drawing predominantly on the work of Jäger (2001) and his identification of “discourse strands,” to capture major discourse themes and “discourse planes,” to account for actors and organizations speaking from different positions, and to unpack the discursive construction of IE programs in BC. Specifically, we address the following questions: What discourse strands (i.e., dominant themes) are most

prominent in the provincial governments' (i.e., the state) construction of IE programs and what discourse strands are most prominent in the mainstream media construction of IE programs? How are these treatments similar, and how do they diverge? What influence might these discursive shapings have upon public understandings of IE programs?

International Education Programs

IE programs are not unique to the BC education context by any means. Matthews and Sidhu (2005) note the top providers of international education are the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. International education programs have, of course, a much longer history in post-secondary contexts, and are a relatively recent emergence in many K–12 settings. Altbach and Knight (2007), two of the foremost researchers on the phenomenon of education internationalization, note that universities have been integral in facilitating the flow of people and ideas across borders since their origin. In the current post-secondary environment, attending institutions abroad is commonplace. In a report on international student mobility, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimated that over 4.3 million students were studying at the tertiary level outside their country of citizenship (OECD, 2013). As of 2013 there were over 160,000 international students attending Canadian universities, with another 61,795 international students enrolled in other post-secondary institutions in Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015). In comparison, students studying in K–12 public and private schools in Canada numbered 45,620 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015).

The first IE programs in BC originated approximately three decades ago (Waters, 2006), focused in urban areas. Since 2001, international education programs have become pervasive,

with districts dedicating increasing resources to program expansion (Kuehn, 2007, 2012). As of 2013–14, 47 of 60 BC school districts ran IE programs, with 11,073 international students in K–12 public schools (BC Ministry of Education, 2014c). Notably, the province has targeted a 50% increase in K–12 international education program enrollments by 2015–16 (BC Ministry of Advanced Education, 2012). Matthews and Sidhu (2005) suggest that, in the current globalizing market for education, “dominant understandings of international education highlight economic necessity and financial benefits” (p. 57). However, IE programs have not always had such a strong economic purposing, with the majority of programs in BC school districts emerging as a purposive or collateral impact under the broader aim of internationalization.

IE Programs Within a Discourse of Internationalization

In terms of defining internationalization, Knight (2004) suggests that there is some confusion and even contradiction in the way that differently positioned actors employ the term. Although specifically oriented toward higher education contexts, Knight provides the following delineation of internationalization:

For some people, it means a series of international activities such as academic mobility for students and teachers; international linkages, partnerships, and projects; and new, international academic programs and research initiatives. For others, it means the delivery of education to other countries through new types of arrangements such as branch campuses or franchises using a variety of face-to-face and distance techniques. To many, it means the inclusion of an international, intercultural, and/or global dimension into the curriculum and teaching learning process. Still others see international development projects and, alternatively, the increasing emphasis on trade in higher education as internationalization. (pp. 5–6)

Although a number of these aspects are not fully relevant to the K–12 context (e.g., research initiatives and increased trade), Knight’s definition is useful for highlighting interpretations and potential activities that fall under the internationalization umbrella.

In education reform, internationalization has become a powerful discourse utilized for political ends. Matthews and Sidhu (2005) note that internationalization can be presented as a natural and inevitable course of action in the face of globalizing forces in the education field, affording it legitimacy and an air of unquestionability in the eyes of the general public. Additionally, Knight (2004) observes that internationalization is used to justify a wide range of policy decisions and program initiatives that are consequential beyond their articulated scope. This type of open-endedness serves simultaneously to enhance legitimacy in the form of broad potentialities that may be achieved (e.g., a more international environment in which intercultural communication becomes second nature) and to obscure aspects of these initiatives that may be more contentious (e.g., disproportionately benefiting some groups over others).

In education, internationalization discourse typically foregrounds socio-cultural benefits, such as increased intercultural communication and contact, promoting greater cultural awareness, the development of international partnerships, and the fostering of global democracy and global peace (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Stromquist, 2007). In practice, it manifests in the enrolment of international students, international exchange programs, research partnerships, knowledge-sharing agreements, and an internationalizing curriculum. Altbach and Knight (2007) note that, “traditional internationalization is rarely a profit-making activity, though it may enhance the competitiveness, prestige, and strategic alliances of [institutions]” (p. 293). However, Matthews and Sidhu (2005) argue that, in the current climate, “economic imperatives . . . [drive] practices of internationalization in both the higher education and latterly in secondary education contexts” (p. 62).

For the current work, we take internationalization in K–12 contexts as a well-recognized and widely legitimized discourse in education reform that foregrounds social and cultural benefits of IE programs, while subordinating economic ramifications.

IE Programs in a Discourse of Marketization

Economic benefits from IE programs are most evident in the form of tuition revenues for education institutions, particularly at the K–12 level. However, residual benefits may also include expanded access to scholarly and business relationships, and the potential for attracting short and long-term international workers to domestic labour markets (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The *BC Jobs Plan* (2012), released in 2012, highlights the place of international education as a key economic driver in the province and the linkage between education for international students and potential eventual entry into the workforce as skilled labour.

Critics of marketization of public education argue that, as economic motivations become more overt, efforts toward internationalization and the goals of intercultural understanding, tolerance, and learning may fall away. Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, and Murillo (2002) define marketization in the educational context as “the intensified injection of market principles such as deregulation, competition, and stratification into the public schools” (p. 1). Other education researchers locate marketization in education as part of a broader shift in public policy that sees the commodification of public services and the fostering of increased competition, which ultimately culminate in increased consumer choice (Lubienski, Gulosino, & Weitzel, 2009; Waslander, Pater, & van der Weide, 2010). Commonly grouped together under the banner of *neoliberalism*, marketization often appears concurrently with destatization (i.e., a shift from state provision of social services to increasingly private), decentralization (i.e., the expansion of

responsibilities for local-level government and non-government actors), and, in some cases, privatization (Connell, 2010; Lubienski, 2006; Ross & Gibson, 2007).

Bartlett et al. (2002) observe that marketization functions both discursively and structurally, fostering a climate of entrepreneurialism and *commonsensibility* that accompanies market-oriented reforms. IE programs encourage and even necessitate entrepreneurial motivations on the part of school districts, with increasing resources dedicated to international marketing and recruitment in an effort to increase revenues. However, Matthews and Sidhu (2005) charge that “the politically neutral language of the market provides little discursive space for understanding [the] complexities which surround the production and consumption of international education” (p. 57).

In contrast to the earlier delineation of internationalization motives for IE programs, we define a discourse of marketization as one in which the economic motivations of IE programs are promoted, over and above the social and cultural benefits. While doing so, we acknowledge that internationalization and marketization are not necessarily mutually exclusive categorizations, nor are they the only potential discursive frames through which understandings of IE programs might be shaped. However, for the purposes of this work, they are the two that we have chosen as most relevant to unpack the selected context.

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The conceptual framework for this study is informed by the work of Ball (1990), on policy as discourse, and the work of Lingard and Rawolle (2004) and Rawolle (2005, 2010), on policy mediatization. These authors help us to understand the ways in which the fields of provincial education policy and media overlap and potentially work to co-construct public

understanding of international education in the province. In terms of methodology, we draw upon Jäger (2001) in critical discourse analysis to understand how particular policy discourses may be constituted, gain strength, circulate, and evolve.

Policy as Discourse

In positing his perspective on policy as discourse, Ball (1993) draws from the seminal work of Foucault (1974) in stating, “discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority” (Ball, 1993, p. 48). This interpretation extends his reading of discourse beyond simply language, to the production and regulation of ways of thinking and being. Grimaldi (2012) explains that this conceptualization of policy allows us to query as to what underlying commonsense understandings drive policy processes, and function “invisibly” to shape the ways in which policy actors carry out their roles. Bacchi (2000) notes that policy as discourse relates not simply to policy “solutions,” but works to concurrently construct the “problem” that is to be addressed. We employ this concept to understand the role of discourse as fundamentally important to how IE programs are understood (i.e., discursively shaped), both as a policy solution and in terms of what problem they are intended to address.

Mediatization

Mediatization, developed out of work with Bourdieu’s (1990) field theory of social relations and the idea of a (partially) autonomous “education policy field” (Lingard, Rawolle, & Taylor, 2005; Rawolle & Lingard, 2008), posits a co-constructive relationship between the state and the media in discursively producing education policy and shaping its public reception and

understanding. Rawolle (2010) observes that in education policy studies, the media has become a significant consideration, since “the presence of the media is ubiquitous, with few policies being produced without accompanying media releases and advertising campaigns” (p. 21). Other researchers, including B. Levin (2004) and Blackmore and Thomson (2004), also acknowledge the role of the media in shaping policy processes in education. Extending the recursive relation between institutions of government and media, Lingard and Rawolle (2004) argue that “today journalists and their logics are not only operant in the journalistic field in the media, but also in the offices of politicians and policy producers, thus affecting the very processes of policy production” (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004, p. 362). Rawolle (2010) further suggests that mediatization is generally not isolated in a single event, but part of an ongoing process of change and relations between the state and the media. The concept of mediatization thus offers utility in the examination of IE programs in BC, given that it incorporates a role for the media, as well as government, which may function over time to influence public understanding.

In utilizing the concept of mediatization, we are not arguing the state–media relationship unilaterally determines the discourse within which policy are disseminated. As explained by Ball (2007), policy enters a social context, with a myriad of pre-existing constraints and affordances—both systemic and agential—and is incorporated into a flow of issues, opinions, and happenstances that shape the outcomes, in relation to education. The state is but one influence, although powerful, and the media are also clearly relevant, but neither should be viewed as absolute in determining how policy is discursively shaped. We thus utilize the concept of mediatization to understand how government and media work, potentially in collaboration or potentially in antagonism. One method by which this complex dynamic may be unraveled is through the careful analysis of discourse.

Jäger's Critical Discourse Analysis

In her discussion of the use of critical discourse analysis in education policy research, Taylor (2004) explains that “CDA explores how texts construct representations of the world, social relationships, and social identities . . . [with] an emphasis on highlighting how such practices and texts are ideologically shaped” (p. 435). In this study, we are specifically interested in how the state and the media discursively shape public understanding of IE programs; thus, CDA offers a powerful tool for unpacking these constructions. In terms of my specific employment of CDA, we draw from the work of Jäger who develops a detailed analytic framework for analyzing the discursive work of the media. Jäger (2001) explains,

Discourses are not interesting as mere expressions of social practice, but because they serve certain ends, namely to exercise power with all its effects. They do this because they are institutionalized and regulated, because they are linked to action. (p. 34)

In terms of the discursive co-construction of IE programs by the state and the media, it is specifically these acts of institutionalization that are of interest. In depicting his approach, Jäger offers the basic methodological building block of *discourse strands*, defined as “thematically uniform discourse processes,” or, in other words, dominant themes. In the case of the current study, the concept of discourse strands is of great utility given that dominant strands capture the discourse of marketization and the discourse of internationalization.

Discourse planes are another useful element of Jäger’s conceptualization, which he depicts as “societal locations from which ‘speaking’ happens” (p. 49). He provides the examples of the sciences, politics, media, and education, among others. Discourse planes are useful for understanding differentiation between actors and organizations in the government and in the media, which might otherwise be taken for granted as homogenous. This recognition becomes

particularly relevant for the assumption of the state as a single, unified voice on a particular policy or program.

Jäger also identifies *discourse fragments* as foci for analysis, more commonly discussed as texts in other applications of CDA. However, Jäger selects the term fragments given that, “texts (can) address several themes and thus contain several discourse fragments” (p. 47), within each. Discourse fragments are then sections of texts that align with particular discourse strands, potentially revealing complex “entanglements” rather than simplified, succinct patterns that can misrepresent the messiness of discursive processes in practice. We see this particular aspect of Jäger’s work paralleling that of Ball (1994), who contends that policy processes are messy, *ad hoc* undertakings that cannot always be captured with linear explanation. Jäger’s work thus offers utility for unpacking the discursive construction of policy, unearthing inter-textual and inter-discursive references that link policies together, giving them legitimacy, and latticing their effects into more complex policy agendas that act in simultaneity.

Data Sources

Data for this analysis are drawn from policy documents and press releases available between the years 2005 and 2014, primarily from the Ministry of Education, responsible for K–12 education, and the Ministry of Advanced Education, responsible for post-secondary education in the province. We also look at media coverage in the form of electronic newspaper articles. The majority of media sources identified were from mainstream outlets, such as the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Globe and Mail*. In total, 49 policy documents, news releases, and media articles with reference to IE were located from between the years 2005 and 2014 (listed in the Appendix). Analysis of these sources was conducted in winter 2014 and early 2015.

Discussion

Analysis of government and media documents revealed three primary findings. Firstly, a disjuncture between government ministries (i.e., discourse planes) in terms of how international education is discursively constructed was evident. The Ministry of Advanced Education, responsible for post-secondary education in the province, appears as the primary voice on international education, with the Ministry of Education taking a more sublimated role. Secondly, the Ministry of Education does not privilege either sociocultural or economic impacts of IE programs, offering a rather balanced perspective that acknowledges both benefits and drawbacks. Thirdly, media outlets, both within the province of BC and beyond, focus almost exclusively on economic outcomes, with little mention of the social and cultural benefits that underpin internationalization arguments for international education.

Diverging Discourse Planes

At the outset of this study, we assumed the state as a predominantly cohesive entity with a common discourse regarding how IE programs were to be imagined, portrayed, and implemented. In other words, although working from different discourse planes, various ministries within the provincial government would offer the same, and very likely mutually reinforcing, perspective. However, this reading is not borne out in analysis. The government's vision for international education as a focal point for growth in the education sector in the province appears principally driven by the Ministry of Advanced Education. This result was surprising given that the *BC International Education Strategy* (2012) impacts all levels of education, K–12 and post-secondary, as well as public and private institutions. The Ministry of Education has, to date, given little attention to the International Education Strategy in publically

available documents. There is also no inclusion of international education in the *2012 BC Education Plan*, which is the principle document guiding reform for K–12 education in the province, with an absence of intertextual reference between the two.

A dominant feature of the International Education Strategy is its close alignment with the *BC Jobs Plan* (Province of British Columbia, 2011), an initiative from the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training that also outlines expectations for international education at both the post-secondary and K–12 levels. These overlapping policy contexts promote a climate for fostering a skilled workforce that is dependent upon increasing in the number of international students in the province. Former Minister of Advanced Education Naomi Yamamoto highlights this intersection, stating, “As part of the BC Jobs Plan we’ve set a goal of increasing our overall international student count by 50 per cent over four years” (Yamamoto, 2011). A projected 33% decline in the number of new workers to the job force in BC over the next two decades constructs what appears as a crisis of economic collapse and a desperate need for an injection of skilled workers. In a 2011 news release, the Ministry of Advanced Education emphasized this concern and specifically identified international education as a possible solution:

British Columbia will need to fill more than one million job openings by 2019. Currently, there are only 650,000 young people who will emerge from our school system to fill those jobs. We will increasingly need to rely on talent from outside the province to address this gap. In fact, we expect that immigrants will fill one-third of our job openings. International students are potentially the skilled, educated, young immigrants who can help address our future labour market challenges. (BC Ministry of Advanced Education, 2011)

This depicts international education as purely instrumental, valuing international students in terms of human capital first and foremost.

Dominant Discursive Strands

In terms of discursive strands (i.e., dominant themes), although documents from the Ministry of Advanced Education acknowledge economic impacts of IE programs, they clearly emphasize internationalization. For example, former Minister Yamamoto opens her “Message from the Minister” in the *BC International Education Strategy*, stating, “Everyone benefits from the cultural diversity international students bring to our campuses and communities, and from the perspectives gained by BC students studying in other countries” (BC Ministry of Advanced Education, 2012, p. 7). In another example, the Ministry of Advanced Education explains,

The Government of British Columbia is on track to meet the BC Jobs Plan target to increase international students studying in BC by 50% by 2016. Welcoming more international students will cultivate greater opportunities for cultural and educational exchanges for BC students, and create substantial positive economic growth for the province. (BC Ministry of Advanced Education, 2014)

This type of reiteration of social and cultural benefits has been consistent from this ministry, looking back as far as 2008, when they declared,

International students contribute greatly to the communities in which they study and live. Not only do they have a positive economic and social impact on those communities, but they also add to the globalization of our colleges and universities. (BC Ministry of Advanced Education, 2008)

However, social and cultural benefits are rarely detailed and remain largely unsubstantiated, beyond the occasional anecdote, while economic benefits of international education are consistently accompanied by statistical evidence (e.g., revenue figures or student headcounts).

This may, however, be attributable to the difficulties inherent in accurately capturing and measuring the development of intercultural skills, and the impact of interaction between international students and domestic BC students, and international students and individuals from the wider BC communities in which they are living. Despite the development of numerous

analytical instruments for intercultural competence and understanding (Fantini, 2007), there is no single instrument universally acknowledged.

In addressing economic benefits, documents from the Ministry of Advanced Education generally place emphasis upon the benefits of tuition revenue, but also highlight collateral benefits including additional revenue (e.g., out-of-school student expenditures and homestay fees) injected into local communities, residual jobs creation, and a positive impact upon trade relations with countries that are key suppliers of international students to BC. As an example, another former Minister of Advanced Education, Amrik Virk, explained,

International students spend a great deal of money while they are here, supporting local jobs and businesses. They travel around our beautiful province to see the sights, ski, hike and bike, as well as eat and shop. In 2010, international students spent \$1.8 billion in British Columbia on tuition, accommodation and other living expenses, generating 22,000 jobs. (Virk, 2013)

This type of economic stimulus is in addition to the more than \$140 million in direct revenue generation for school districts realized in 2013–14 (BC Ministry of Education, 2014a). In the *BC International Education Strategy*, it is estimated that,

BC will gain an estimated 1,800 additional jobs and \$100 million in GDP for every ten per cent increase in the number of international students coming to our province, the economic benefit of growth in international education provides a major boost to BC communities. (BC Ministry of Advanced Education, 2012, p. 13)

The climate for international education, characterized by increasing competition among globally dispersed providers, is another common theme. Former Minister Yamamoto (2011) stresses that “BC is just one dot on an increasingly competitive map of countries vying for a bigger share of the international education market. Global competition is becoming fierce.” Drawing attention to the competitive aspects of international education and the need for entrepreneurial creativity may

be seen as justification for dedicating increased resources in the form of manpower and funding toward expanding these programs, as is currently occurring.

These factors all taken into consideration, the discourse emerging from the Ministry of Advanced Education is one that emphasizes the social, cultural, and economic benefits of international education, but with little evidence presented to legitimize the former two considerations. The economic benefits are much easier to illustrate publically, and may also be more impactful on the general public given the political impact of concrete statistics. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that there is an attempt to offer a perspective on international education that is not limited to economics.

Turning attention to the Ministry of Education, quite surprisingly, there are a limited number of documents that directly reference IE programs. Between 2008 and 2014, we found only nine news releases related to international education, with the majority relating to offshore education, rather than the recruitment of international students to BC schools. The key document from the BC Ministry of Education (2013), regarding IE programs, is the *K–12 International Education Regional Roundtables*. In this particular document, IE programs are discussed in terms of benefits, but there is also a great deal of attention to what might be considered more problematic, or even negative, aspects. The report notes internationalization-related benefits, in terms of “provid[ing] a more global perspective and a cultural experience for resident students through academic and social interaction with their international peers” (p. 4). It also refers to economic benefits, both first-hand to school districts in terms of supplemental operating revenue, and as a secondary economic benefit for small communities. For example,

In 2011/12, international student tuition, which averages just over \$12,000 per year for international students, generated \$139M in the public system and an additional estimate of \$29M for independent schools. School districts utilize revenue earned by international programs to support international students and to

supplement operating funds, and these additional funds are deployed in support of a variety of services for resident students. (p. 4)

This treatment is similar to that of the Ministry of Advanced Education. However, after these acknowledgements, the report diverges to openly address less positive aspects.

In the *Roundtables Report* there is explicit mention of internationalization benefits, but with a clearly articulated qualifier: “Tangible benefits exist to internationalizing BC’s schools and curriculum, and in seeking opportunities to grow, but this also comes *with tangible risks and liabilities*” (p. 1, italics added). Although the purpose of this particular report, as a summary of stakeholder opinions in K–12 education, serves a different purpose than those cited from the Ministry of Advanced Education, there is a clear divergence in how international education is approached. In the Advanced Education documents, there is little to no discussion of significant drawbacks or issues of contention. International education is constructed as a field of opportunity that, while challenging in terms of a globally competitive market, there is no substantive discussion of (in)equities or potential negative outcomes for any stakeholder group (e.g., students, teachers, administrators, or parents).

The *Roundtables Report* from the Ministry of Education notes significant concerns in the following areas: firstly, with the issue of inequities between districts in terms of attracting and in terms of meeting the educational (and other) needs of international students:

Large school districts have the advantage of economies of scale, expertise, location, and recognition (brand recognition^[L]_{SEP} in their own right)...Small, more rural programs find it much more difficult to attract students and, with lower volume, incur higher costs and lower margins. (p. 3)

Secondly, a number of teaching-related challenges are referenced, in terms of time required for sufficient (English) language acquisition necessary for successful participation in classes (p. 10), and in support for international students with special needs (personal or learning-related) (p. 11).

Finally, there is caution raised in relation to “a clash of Canadian values and cultural norms with those of other cultures” (p. 12). Recognition of these concerns indicates, in some measure, that the Ministry of Education regards international education with a degree of caution, while not losing sight of the economic imperatives and potential social and cultural benefits that support its expansion.

Outside of the *Roundtables Report*, treatment of international education by the Ministry of Education has been scarce, but relatively balanced between a discourse of internationalization and one of marketization. As an example, a new offshore school in France has been promoted as “develop[ing] and strengthen[ing] cultural and economic ties with other countries while creating more pathways for international students to come to BC to study in both our K–12 and post-secondary systems” (BC Ministry of Education, 2014b). New agreements for schools in China aim toward “pav[ing] the way for educational co-operation, . . . instructor exchanges, and the sharing of ideas on teacher development, teaching and assessment methods” (BC Ministry of Education, 2012a). Simultaneously, there is also attention given to promoting “the BC education brand” and creating “mutual economic opportunities” (BC Ministry of Education, 2012b). However, the discourse in general does not fall to economic reductionism.

The Media’s Discursive Construction of IE Programs

In contrast to the government ministries discussed thus far, the primary discursive strands from mainstream media sources are almost exclusively focused upon revenues and associated economic considerations from IE programs, with little to no discussion of social and cultural considerations.

The majority of media articles addressing IE programs in BC were found in the *Vancouver Sun*—one of the two major daily newspapers in the province. Coverage of IE programs in the *Sun* focused heavily upon the revenue-generating capacities, repeatedly enumerating large figures and including direct quotations from district administrators and other commentators with a similar focus. For example, Steffenhagen (2013), a reporter who frequently covers education for the *Sun*, provides specific dollar amounts associated with IE program tuition fees and revenues: “BC public schools have more than 10,000 non-resident students, who pay an average of \$12,135 a year” (Steffenhagen, 2012); “[one district’s] international students program . . . generated \$2.9 million in net revenues last year” (Steffenhagen, 2008); and, “the international students program collects about \$12,000 a year in tuition from each of 70 foreign students who attend” (Steffenhagen, 2006). Steffenhagen (2013) also evaluates the success of IE programs in economic terms, stating, “West Vancouver has had a highly successful international student program for many years and it produces millions of dollars in revenue every year.” She is not alone in this focus, also evidenced in the work of a fellow *Sun* reporter, Sherlock (2014), who remarks, “Tuition fees from international students are an important source of revenue for school boards.”

Reporters in the *Vancouver Sun* also appear to highlight problematic aspects of IE programs, rather than promoting their benefits (e.g., internationalization benefits of increased intercultural engagement). Steffenhagen draws attention to concerns with IE programs regarding equity, increasingly risky business ventures on the part of public school districts, and non-educational demands upon educators and administrators. In the first respect, Steffenhagen (2012) notes that international students “generally favour high-performing urban schools.” She also quotes the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF), noting, “Entrepreneurial efforts in

West Vancouver and other urban districts are creating huge rifts between have and have-not schools and destroying the principle of public education” (Steffenhagen, 2008). On another occasion, the reporter highlights the work of one large district in attempting to establish a for-profit preschool abroad with funding from onshore international education (Steffenhagen, 2006). She also brings to light a quote from BC parents claiming that “business ventures also take the time and attention of staff” (Steffenhagen, 2006).

On yet another occasion, Steffenhagen (2005) problematizes IE programs in terms of treatment of and care for international students while they study in BC. She states, “International education programs that raise big bucks for BC schools but force some young students to live under conditions described as appalling,” and quotes a BCTF representative who suggests that “students are treated as commodities by the agents and the school districts” (Steffenhagen, 2005). Other concerns with IE programs that are raised in articles appearing in the *Vancouver Sun* include the uncertainty of engaging in international student recruitment on the global market, which is depicted as “fickle” (Sherlock, 2014) and one of “relentless competition” (Todd, 2014).

In more recent coverage, *Sun* reporter Sherlock (2014) highlighted a different aspect of IE programs, noting, “International students are valued both for their immediate contributions to the economy in the form of tuition fees and living expenses, and for their potential as immigrants to Canada.” This acknowledgement reflects the alignment of aims between the BC International Education Strategy and the BC Jobs Plan signaled above, and championed by the Ministry of Advanced Education—an aspect not previously brought to light in media coverage of IE programs.

In terms of other media outlets, focus upon economic benefits, specifically IE program revenues, is also evident. Headlines, alone, indicate this particular emphasis, with Canadian

national news magazine *Macleans* leading with “Cashing in on Foreign Students” (S. Findlay, 2011), national newspaper the *Globe and Mail* stating, “Foreign Students Inject Millions Into School Coffers” (Baluja, 2011), and, on another occasion, “Canada’s Public Schools Attract Foreign Families Willing to Pay Dearly” (Mitchell, 2004). These particular articles are notable given that they derive from national media sources, not strictly focused on BC, but pay considerable attention to IE programs in this province. *Macleans’* reporter Findlay offers the following extensive discussion of a large, urban BC district:

Vancouver school district, brought in \$16 million selling 1700 BC classroom spots to foreign students . . . the program in Vancouver one of the most extensive in Canada and the envy of the scores of districts across the country looking to cash in on the growing market for international students . . . foreign students bring in the equivalent of 16.4 per cent of its operating budget. It may not be the traditional portrait of public education, but it could be the future. (S. Findlay, 2011)

In another example, the *Globe and Mail* reporter Baluja (2011) also pointed to a BC school district as a revenue-generating success, revealing that “the Vancouver suburb of Coquitlam, brought in \$16-million—6.5 per cent of the district’s operating budget.”

Beyond local and provincial media outlets, as well as in national publications, IE programs in BC have reached a stage of prominence evidenced by coverage in two somewhat unexpected sources. Firstly, the acclaimed American publication the *Wall Street Journal* offered commentary in a 2014 article by Chow, which highlighted Vancouver within the Canadian context of international education. He states,

Canadian public schools are more than happy to take in the Chinese. Faced with stagnant enrollment, higher costs and cuts in government funding, foreign students are seen as a way to partially make up the revenue shortfall. In Vancouver, the city’s main school board forecasts to collect C\$20 million in international fees this coming year. (Chow, 2014)

Finally, identifying another somewhat unlikely source of media coverage, although closer to home, *BC Business Magazine* offered a more in-depth look at IE programs, perhaps unsurprisingly declaring them successful, from an economic perspective, but with limitations: “There’s no doubt BC has earned its chops in the fierce global arena for international students, but there’s a limit to the entrepreneurial abilities of school districts; they are, after all, bureaucracies run by educators, not MBAs” (A. Findlay, 2013).

Taking all of these examples together, there is significant evidence to suggest that the majority of media coverage has focused on revenue generation and other market-related aspects of IE programs, but with almost no attention on internationalization. This is in contrast to the Ministry of Advanced Education, and to a lesser extent the Ministry of Education, for whom social and cultural benefits are much more evident in depictions and discussions. Moreover, the media has not shied away from critiquing IE programs, touching upon concerns raised in the *Roundtables Report* from the Ministry of Education, but largely avoided by the Ministry of Advanced Education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we revisit the research questions that have guided this study. The first two questions were as follows:

What discourse strands (i.e., dominant themes) are most evident in the government construction and the media construction of IE programs? How are these treatments similar, and how do they diverge?

In terms of government ministries, examples of both internationalization and marketization discourses emerged. However, it is significant to note that economic aspects are underpinned by statistical data (e.g., revenues, student headcounts, job creation), while internationalization

claims are anecdotal or unsupported. This may be partially attributable to the fact that the types of benefits associated with internationalization—i.e., social and cultural benefits—lend themselves to more qualitative forms of measure, and thus are more difficult to concisely include in a news brief or similarly framed document.

The clearly articulated alignment between the *BC International Education Strategy* and the *BC Jobs Plan* is of interest given that the underlying goal of boosting immigration of skilled workers into BC directly through IE programs can be read as a confluence of the two discursive strands noted above, internationalization and marketization. The immigration of skilled workers is neither purely an economic concern, nor one that may be isolated in terms of its political or cultural implications. There are overlapping implications for the social, cultural, and economic, however, the extent to which each of these considerations is emphasized and addressed remains unclear. Finally, in clear contrast to the Ministry of Advanced Education and the Ministry of Education, media outlets almost universally focused upon economic considerations, with little to no discussion of internationalization.

The third research addressed the potential impact of discursive patterns upon the public:

What influence might the discursive shapings of government and media have upon public understandings of IE programs?

The dominant discursive frame of the provincial government was not homogenous and cohesive in its discursive approach to IE programs. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education differed in their discursive construction of these programs. Moreover, integrating a consideration of the discursive treatment by the media, there does not appear to be a singular, cohesive, complementary discourse on IE programs. Thus, the primary argument inherent in the concept of mediatization does not explain why the general public has remained

largely silent on this issue. Mediatization suggests a co-constructed discursive shaping by government and media that then influences public understanding of education reform problems and solutions. However, in the case of IE programs, the discursive planes did not appear to align. It seems quite evident that the media did not adopt a complementary approach with the state. It is worth noting that this investigation considered only mainstream print media sources, with independent media and TV and radio falling outside of data collection.

In light of these findings, the question of lack of public reaction to IE programs as a potentially significant concern for access and equity in public education has not been addressed. In terms of possible alternative explanations, it may now be that the commonsensibility of marketization (e.g., commodification, competition, and choice) and economic aims (e.g., revenue generation, fiscal efficiency) for education reform has normalized to the extent that these motivations are deemed acceptable by the general public (Ball, 2009). In other words, as Connell (2006) posits, bringing education reforms to public attention may have little impact in any case, given the dominance of marketization and associated neoliberal values already saturating the public sphere.

In terms of future research, an examination of public understandings of IE programs, and other market-oriented reforms, through ethnographic or similar methodological approaches with members of the public and potentially of education policy makers is needed. Further study may shed light upon how the discursive work of government bodies and media outlets is received and interpreted. This research might also provide some insight into how the general public views public education as a whole, in terms of its intended, or ideal, outcomes and aims. It seems this is a discussion that has not taken place in a cohesive and comprehensive manner for some time, allowing the public education system to be guided by the ghosts of its past and buffered by the

political whims of its present, rather than as the purposive, directed, collectively beneficial institution it has the potential to be.

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APPENDIX: GOVERNMENT AND MEDIA DOCUMENTS

GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

| Department | Doc Type | Year | Title |
|---|-----------------|------|---|
| Ministry of Education (Ed.) | News release | 2006 | Province to review school district business companies |
| Ministry of Advanced Education (Adv. Ed.) | News release | 2006 | Report shows international education creates jobs |
| Ministry of Adv. Ed. | News release | 2007 | Province competes for more international students |
| Ministry of Ed. | News release | 2008 | Minister visits China to build on education and economy |
| Ministry of Adv. Ed. | News release | 2008 | BC #1 destination for international students |
| Ministry of Ed. | News release | 2011 | Oak Bay to get new high school |
| Ministry of Adv. Ed. | Op-Ed | 2011 | Yamamoto – International students bring value to BC communities and campuses |
| Office of the Premier, Ministry of Adv. Ed., Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation | News release | 2011 | BC maps future growth through international education and skills training |
| Ministry of Adv. Ed. | News release | 2011 | BC maps future growth through international education and skills training |
| Ministry of Adv. Ed. | News release | 2011 | Launching the next generation as international citizens |
| Ministry of Ed. | Service Plan | 2012 | M. of Ed. Service Plan 2012/13-2014/15 |
| Ministry of Ed. | News release | 2012 | BC aims to strengthen education ties with China |
| Ministry of Adv. Ed. | Policy document | 2012 | British Columbia's International Education Strategy |
| Ministry of Adv. Ed. | News release | 2012 | International Education Strategy a roadmap for BC's future |
| Ministry of Ed. | News release | 2012 | Two new BC offshore schools in Hebei province |
| Ministry of Ed. | News release | 2012 | Two new BC-certified schools in works for Shanghai |
| Ministry of Ed. | Report | 2013 | K-12 International Education Regional Roundtables |
| Ministry of Ed. | News release | 2013 | Ministry releases results of international education roundtables |
| Ministry of Adv. Ed. | Op-ed | 2013 | We all benefit from international education |
| Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training (JTST) | News release | 2013 | BC Jobs Plan Update |
| Ministry of JTST | News release | 2013 | FACTSHEET: International trade network and missions |
| Ministry of Adv. Ed. | News release | 2014 | Celebrating International Education Week in BC |
| Ministry of Ed. | News release | 2014 | City of Light to host newest BC offshore school |
| Ministry of Ed. | News release | 2014 | New BC offshore school highlights International Education Week |
| Ministry of Adv. Ed. | News release | 2014 | Core review strengthens private institutions, libraries and international education |
| Ministry of JTST | News release | 2014 | BC launches Skills for Jobs blueprint to re-engineer education and training |

MEDIA ARTICLES

| Source | Author | Year | Title |
|--------------------------|---------------------|------|---|
| Globe and Mail | Mitchell, Alanna | 2004 | Canada's public schools attract foreign families willing to pay dearly |
| Vancouver Sun | Steffenhagen, Janet | 2005 | International students are 'exploited' by BC schools, teachers say |
| Vancouver Sun | Steffenhagen, Janet | 2006 | School districts cuts costs, loses money abroad |
| Prince Rupert Daily News | Canadian Press | 2006 | School board side businesses should be scrapped |
| Vancouver Sun | Steffenhagen, Janet | 2008 | \$100,000 of district's money spent on principal's world tour |
| Globe and Mail | Mahoney, Jill | 2008 | School boards turning to foreign students to fill classrooms as enrolments decline |
| Maclean's | Findlay, Stephanie | 2011 | Cashing in on foreign students |
| Vancouver Sun | Steffenhagen, Janet | 2011 | Clark wants more foreign students in BC |
| Globe and Mail | Baluja, Tamara | 2011 | Foreign students inject millions into school coffers ⁷¹⁷ But critics say an increasing reliance on such an unstable revenue stream is problematic ⁷¹⁸ |
| Vancouver Sun | Steffenhagen, Janet | 2012 | Sweeping changes proposed for BC's international student programs |
| Vancouver Sun | Steffenhagen, Janet | 2012 | Sweeping changes proposed for BC's international student programs (UPDATED) |
| Vancouver Courier | O'Connor, Naoibh | 2012 | Seven Vancouver School Board staffers earn more than \$150k |
| Parksville Qualicum News | Staff Writer | 2012 | Calls made to expand international program |
| Penticton Western News | Staff Writer | 2012 | Okanagan Skaha looks to attract international students |
| Vancouver Courier | Rossi, Cheryl | 2012 | Class Notes: Save the date ⁷¹⁹ School board to publish 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 calendars in spring ⁷²⁰ |
| Alberni Valley Times | Smith, Roland | 2013 | Talk business in China instead of education |
| Vancouver Sun | Steffenhagen, Janet | 2013 | Employee expenses – West Vancouver school district |
| BC Business Magazine | Findlay, Andrew | 2013 | Paying for public school |
| Vancouver Sun | Sherlock, Tracy | 2014 | BC school shutdown has China 'concerned' |
| Vancouver Sun | Todd, Douglas | 2014 | 'Best and brightest' slogan a catchphrase that rings hollow |
| Wall Street Journal | Chow, Jason | 2014 | Canada, eh? Chinese students flock to Canuck high schools |
| Vancouver Sun | Chiang, Chuck | 2014 | Many Asian families place blame for strike firmly with teachers |
| Vancouver Sun | Fralic, Shelley | 2014 | ESL, the trouble with our schools |